

HLPF 2025 Highlights: Monday, 14 July 2025

The 2025 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), convening under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), opened with a series of keynote addresses introducing the theme of advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the afternoon, delegates embarked on a progress review of SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), the first of five spotlight SDGs at the Forum.

Opening Session

Lok Bahadur Thapa, Vice-President, ECOSOC, noted HLPF 2025 coincides with the 10th anniversary of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and lamented insufficient progress across the Goals, with stagnation and regression on some SDG targets. He invited delegates to adopt the provisional agenda (E/HLPF/2025/1).

Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, linked geopolitical conflicts, financing gaps, inequalities, and climate change to slow SDG progress, while pointing to progress on some targets as a reason for hope. She noted the Voluntary National Reviews represent powerful roadmaps to achieve the SDGs and mobilize all stakeholders but stressed the need to have more space for civil society, especially at the local level.

Via video, Anatolio Ndong Mba, Vice-President of ECOSOC, highlighted the need to maintain climate action, sustainable development and resilience at the heart of UN reforms. Among other critical issues, he underlined the just energy transition, responsible use of critical minerals, and bridging the digital divide through responsible AI management.

Townhall: Unlocking means of implementation: Mobilizing financing and Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs

Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, introduced the SDG progress report, stating that 35% of SDG targets are making moderate progress, whereas progress on 47% is insufficient and 18% are regressing. He noted progress on access to essential services and child mortality, while underscoring challenges on extreme poverty, increasing debt burden, and carbon emissions.

Opening the panel discussion, Moderator Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), asked panelists to reflect on how technology can support SDG progress.

Noting that innovation spreads too slowly, Robert Kirkpatrick, United Cities Foundation, highlighted an open access digital twin initiative as an innovative solution, but stressed cities should ensure that such initiatives help to foster local knowledge.

Sanda Ojiambo, CEO, UN Global Compact, called for, *inter alia*: more details to incentivize private sector investment; debt

reform; less biased risk ratings; better matchmaking between capital and bankable projects; and coherence in regulatory frameworks.

Robbert Dijkgraaf, President-Elect, International Science Council, called for co-designed and co-produced science with local governments and communities; strengthening the science advisory system; and a global digital compact for science as a global common good.

In her response, discussant Emilia Reyes, Program Director, Policies and Budgets for Equality and Sustainable Development, Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia, Mexico, called private investments a huge factor in human rights violations, saying some wealthy countries blocked ambition at the recently-concluded Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4).

Marcia Barbosa, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, stated that capabilities are underutilized, and urged open science aligned with communities' needs and systemic challenges.

During the interactive discussion, many countries welcomed the Sevilla Commitment adopted at FfD4, with several speakers calling for more innovative financial mechanisms to bridge funding gaps, as well as rethinking the current financial architecture to advance transparency, equality, and mutual respect.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH demanded enhanced youth participation in FfD4 follow-up.

Many countries highlighted ongoing efforts to boost SDG financing, ranging from macroeconomic reforms and human resource development to enhancing blended finance and other innovative mechanisms.

While welcoming the potential of technology in bridging financing and other gaps, many speakers highlighted associated risks, especially regarding misinformation.

FRANCE, alongside many other speakers, underscored the need to adopt an inclusive, open, and multistakeholder approach and to conduct AI research equitably and responsibly. The PHILIPPINES called for platforms that provide safe spaces for scientists and innovators to collaborate. COLOMBIA highlighted scientific diplomacy to support science collaboration and technology transfer.

GHANA noted the existence of a third gap – the productive gap – in addition to financial and innovation gaps, calling for a “productivity revolution” in both the public and private sectors.

Discussing the relevance of the FfD4 outcome to Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), NEPAL highlighted the importance of digital innovation, improving human capacity, investing in education and mobilizing financial skills. The INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION said investing in the rule of law allows countries to attract investment, promote access to health services, and provide equal opportunities for women and girls.

POLAND highlighted statistical capacity building including for alternative data for transparent and data-driven decision making. SAUDI ARABIA noted gaps in empowerment to develop and access technology solutions.

The WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP said inaction on SDGs 3 and 5 will erode 30 years' progress on women's human rights and wellbeing in implementing commitments made under the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.

Outlining findings from the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2024 report, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) noted a widening productivity gap between high-, middle-, and low-income countries.

Other issues highlighted in the discussions included the need for:

- long-term support for STI as a catalyst for accelerated transformation;
- partnerships for scaling innovations that support vulnerable communities;
- reducing the debt burden of poor countries; and
- capacity building for AI and AI-enabled technologies to bridge the digital divide and enhance data protection and sovereignty.

SDGs in focus

SDG 3 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages: Opening the session, Chair Lok Bahadur Thapa, Vice-President, ECOSOC, noted that despite progress in some areas, none of the SDG 3 targets are currently on track. He outlined how challenges and megatrends, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, unsustainable urbanization and ageing populations, raise new questions for SDG 3 action, while conflict and displacement aggravate existing health inequalities. He invited panelists and delegates to comment on progress made and share lessons learned in addressing linkages between health and other SDGs.

Moderator Tony Holohan, University College Dublin, asked two panelists to offer perspectives on how to accelerate health system transformation. Magda Robalo, Co-chair, Universal Health Care (UHC) 2030, prioritized universal health care, science and evidence, and health system reform grounded in solidarity and cooperation. Ibrahim Abubakar, University College London, urged rebalancing health investments towards equity and resilience and including vulnerable populations in co-designing health care. He mentioned migration and displacement as defining factors for achieving the SDGs. Regarding where to find hope, both panelists highlighted the role of youth in shaping a different future.

Lead discussant, Shobha Shukla, Executive Director and Managing Editor, Citizen News Service, called for governments and corporations to be accountable for the harms they cause and to have people-centered and gender-inclusive policies to achieve SDG 3 targets.

In the interactive discussion, delegates shared lessons learned from domestic implementation and international cooperation, including decreases in maternal and child mortality, improved primary health care, mandatory health care, and national health insurance programmes, digitalization, and linkages to other SDGs that contribute to living conditions and societal wellbeing.

Some noted challenges such as conflict, urban pollution, and decreased health funding. Many called for domestic resource mobilization, multisectoral approaches, increased multilateral coordination, and universal and equitable health coverage.

On ways to accelerate SDG 3 implementation, delegates stressed: the importance of adopting multidisciplinary, holistic, and integrated approaches; increased adoption of STI,

especially digital health initiatives; international cooperation and partnerships among governments and health institutions; and enhancing mindful participation to build trust between the people and governments.

Several stressed the need to include civil society, youth and Indigenous Peoples in health decision making. THE PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT STAKEHOLDER GROUP urged a rights-based cross-sectoral approach that addresses root causes of inequality. THE LGBTI STAKEHOLDER GROUP noted discrimination on health remains a challenge and urged delegates to adopt and implement inclusive and evidence-based health policies.

On financing equitable health systems, delegates discussed how indebted countries can mobilize resources for universal primary health coverage, with several noting recent declines in international donor funding. One delegate highlighted that out-of-pocket health expenses in underfunded health systems push people into poverty. Others called attention to the most vulnerable, including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, migrants, and people living in conflict areas, and called for people-centered health policies.

FAO stressed the link between food safety, diets, environmental risks, and health. COSTA RICA underscored the risk of zoonotic diseases. COLOMBIA bemoaned increasing resistance to antimicrobials, linking human health to ecosystem restoration.

The WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION stated that despite a dip caused by the COVID-19 crisis, health indicators have been on the rise since then, but noted 75% of mental health conditions in low-income countries remain undetected.

The STATE OF PALESTINE bemoaned the obstruction of SDG 3 progress “by design” through Israel's war in Gaza. UGANDA stressed local drug manufacturing to ensure access during pandemics. MALI outlined measures to prevent drug stock disruptions. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION prioritized guaranteeing free health care, noting numerous achievements despite illegal coercive measures, and urged keeping health care outside politics. GUATEMALA proposed an international alliance for resilient health systems.

Summarizing the session, Robalo called for stakeholder inclusion, particularly civil society, to ensure people-focused health systems. Noting challenges mentioned by indebted countries, Abubakar suggested focusing on aid efficiency, progressive taxation, refocusing donor priorities, and responsible private sector engagement. Holohan suggested reframing health as a positive resource for society and encouraged a “passion to do things differently.”

In The Corridors

As in 2024, the opening day of HLPF 2025 was characterized by numerous references to global crises and their impact on progress towards the SDGs. At the same time, many delegates expressed optimism about the future of multilateralism, inspired by the adoption of the Sevilla Commitment on financing. This led UN Secretary-General António Guterres to note during the press briefing that “We can still solve global problems with collective resolve and solidarity.”

Considering these discussions, the review of progress on the SDGs seemed to be remarkably business-as-usual with the Secretary General's report showing small pockets of progress within an overall sobering assessment that most of the SDGs are advancing too slowly to meet 2030 targets or even regressing. The unacknowledged “elephant in the room,” as one delegate remarked, is that the most recent assaults on global solidarity and cooperation will take time to show in the SDG indicators.